

Report 2892b



nps archaeology

Archaeological Watching Brief at Creake Abbey, North Creake, Norfolk

ENF127760

Prepared for
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February 2012



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<i>Issue 1</i>		

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Location: Creake Abbey, North Creake, Norfolk
District: King's Lynn and West Norfolk
Planning Ref.: n/a
Grid Ref.: TF 8558 3948
HER No.: ENF 127760
SM No.: 21419
OASIS Ref.: 118660
Client: English Heritage
Dates of Fieldwork: 12 October 2011

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted for English Heritage ahead of the replacement of an old information panel at the Scheduled Monument of Creake Abbey, North Creake, Norfolk.

A layer containing mortar and fragments of medieval and post-medieval roof tile was observed during the monitoring of the post-hole excavation.

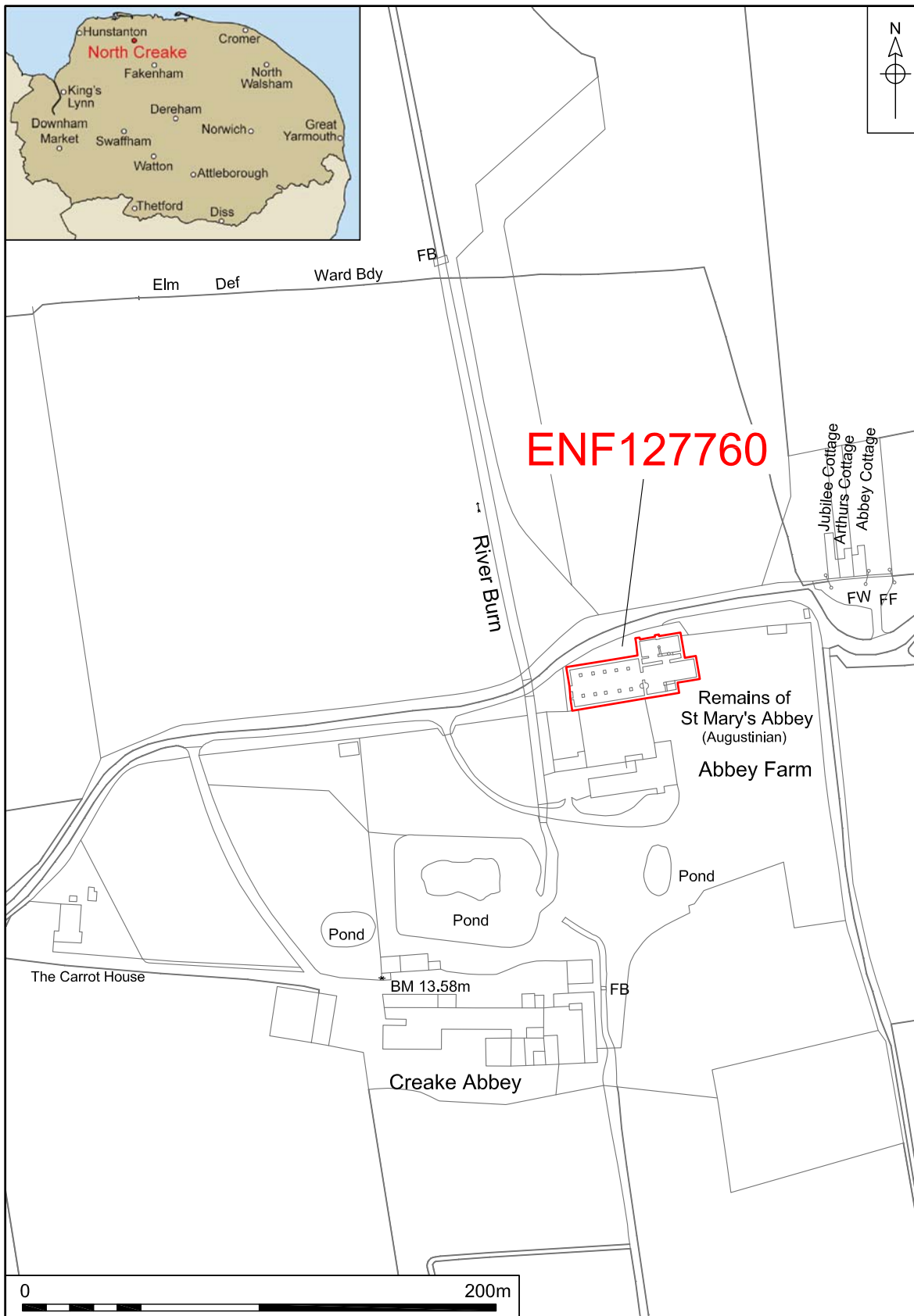
1.0 INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was undertaken on the excavation of two small post-holes to accommodate a new information panel at Creake Abbey, an English Heritage property in North Creake, Norfolk (Fig. 1).



Plate 1. Creake Abbey, looking east

The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. NAU/BAU2892b/DW). This work was commissioned and funded by English Heritage.



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Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:2500

This programme of work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010).

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The bedrock geology of the site is a White Chalk sub-group, with a superficial geology varying between peat and Head group clay, silt, sand and gravel¹.

The topsoil on site was a dark brown silty-sand, with occasional flint inclusions. No natural deposits were encountered during these excavations.

Creake Abbey lies to the north of North Creake alongside the River Burn.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

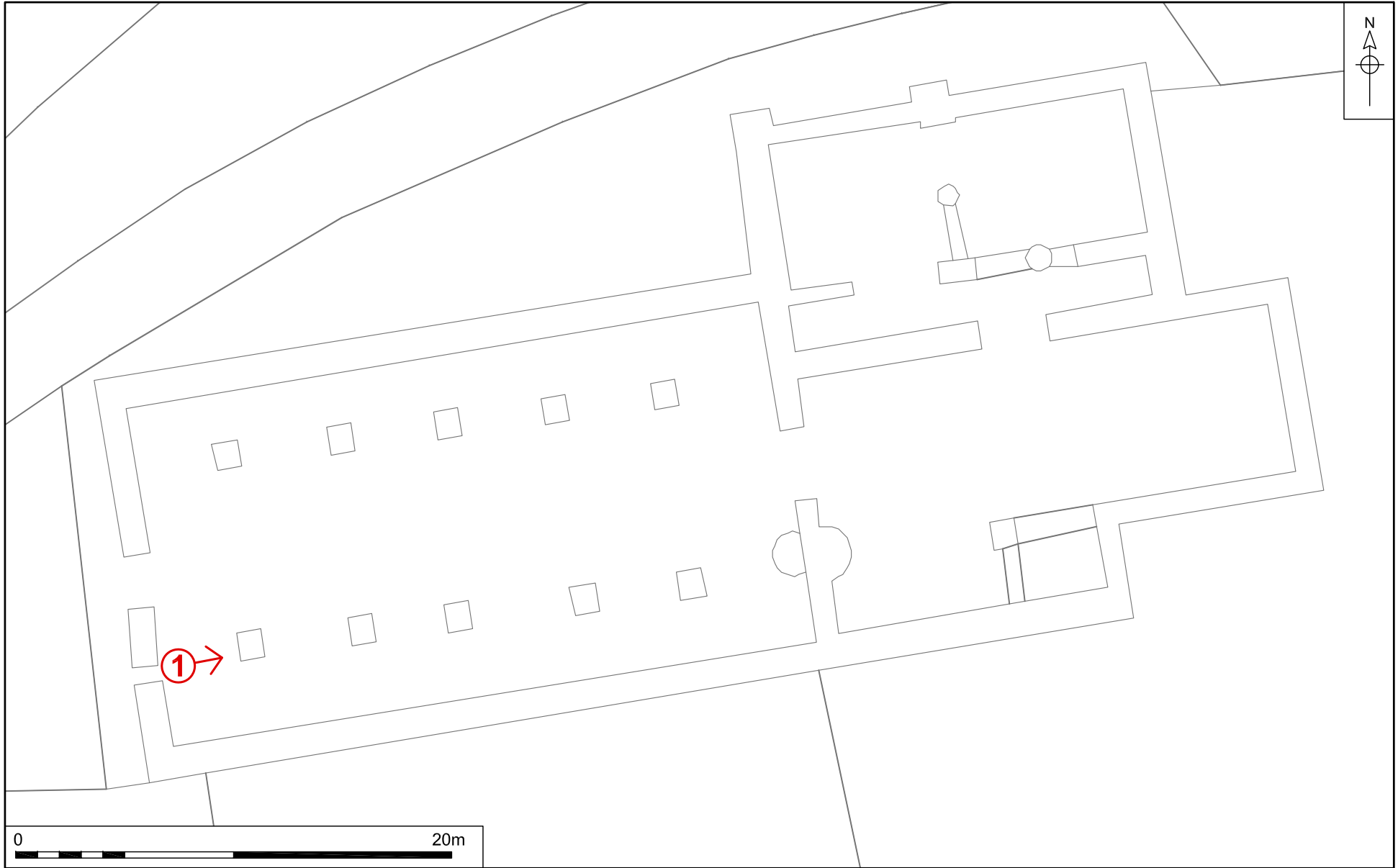
The following description has been extracted from English Heritage's scheduling list (<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1015271>).

The earliest religious foundation on the site was a chapel, which was established in 1206 in a meadow next to the road between North Creake and Burnham by Lady Alice de Nerford and her husband Sir Robert. The abbey, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, was founded and endowed originally by Sir Robert in or soon after 1217 as a hospital dedicated to St Bartholomew by the nephew of Lady Alice's nephew Hubert de Burgh to commemorate victory over the French off Kent. Sir Robert, as constable of Dover Castle, had also taken part in this action.

In 1227 the hospital which, under the terms of its foundation provided for the care of thirteen indigent men under a master and four chaplains, formally adopted the Augustinian Rule and became a priory of regular canons of the order. Following the death of Sir Robert in 1225, Lady Alice granted the right of patronage of the hospital and its property, which included her manor in North Creake, to the Crown, and in 1231 Henry III elevated the priory to the status of an abbey, with the right to elect its own abbot. In the taxation of 1291 the annual income of the abbey was assessed at around £60, and an account roll of 1331 gives a total income for that year of *circa* £160. Later documents record the rebuilding of the east end of the church following a disastrous fire in c.1484.

It is reported that in December 1506 an epidemic caused the death of all the canons (the abbot last of all) at which point the abbey was dissolved and it reverted to the Crown. Its lands and revenues were settled on Christ's College Cambridge, and parts of the abbey church and other monastic buildings were subsequently adapted for use as a farm house and associated farm buildings.

¹ <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/home.html?Accordion1=1#maps>



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Figure 2. Panel location. Scale 1:250

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this watching brief was to minimise the potential impact of the scheme by appropriate levels of archaeological excavation and recording within the development area and to produce a report.

The Brief required that constant supervision be maintained during groundworks for extraction of an old information panel and erection of a new one (Panel 1, Fig. 2). Excavation was carried out by hand under constant archaeological supervision.

No environmental samples were taken due to the lack of suitable deposits.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Digital photographs were taken where appropriate.

Site conditions were overcast and drizzly.

5.0 RESULTS

Two small holes measuring 0.2m by 0.25m and 0.4m deep were excavated on the eastern side of the west wall of the Abbey.



Plate 2. Location of excavations, looking east

The holes were located around 1.1m from the west wall and 3.4m from the south wall (Fig. 2).

No natural deposits were seen during the excavations.

The lowest layer visible was subsoil [3] consisting of soft mid brown silty-sand.

Above this was layer [2] comprised of mortar and tile, measuring 0.15m thick. The spread of this layer is unknown, due to the restrictive nature of the excavations. Finds included within this layer include fragments of medieval and post-medieval roof-tiles and possible medieval mortar, which could feasibly have come from the vicinity of the abbey, although are unlikely to have come from the abbey itself.



Plate 3. Post-excitation view of the post-holes

Topsoil [1] on the site was loose dark brown silty-sand and measured roughly 0.12m in thickness.

6.0 FINDS

by Rebecca Sillwood

All finds were processed and recorded by count and weight, and an Excel spreadsheet was produced outlining broad dating. Each material has been considered separately and is included below organised by material. A list of all finds can be found in Appendix 2a.

6.1 Ceramic Building Material

Four fragments of ceramic building material (cbm) were recovered from the site, all came layer [2]. The pieces are all from roof tiles, with three of the pieces (144g) belonging to the medieval period, and one piece (21g) clearly of post-medieval date. The three medieval pieces are of poorly mixed fabric, and are of varying shades, ranging from off-white to pinkish-orange. Two pieces have evidence for mortar on one surface.

The post-medieval piece is orange-red in colour, with ferrous inclusions, and mortar on one surface.

A small sample of mortar was also taken from deposit [2], and consisted of creamy-white lime mortar with pebble inclusions. This mortar is similar to that found on the medieval roof tiles within the same context.

The fragments of roof tile possibly relate to collapse and/or repair of part of the roof at some point in the past; given the presence of a post-medieval fragment in this small assemblage an alternative (re-)use of the tiles in some way (perhaps on later farm buildings in the vicinity) should not be discounted.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Creake Abbey was a small Augustinian priory founded in the 13th century - originally as a small chapel and later on in the century it adopted the Augustinian rule and became a full-scale abbey. The abbey suffered two major catastrophes; in the 15th century a fire devastated the site and in the 16th century an epidemic or plague caused the death of the inhabitants. The site was already abandoned by the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century, and was later adapted into farm buildings.

This watching brief was carried out to ensure that no major damage was caused to surviving sub-surface remains at this Scheduled Monument, and that anything encountered was recorded. The previously existing information panel was removed and two small holes were excavated to accommodate a new panel. A layer containing medieval and post-medieval roof tile was recorded which could have derived from the erection of post-medieval farm buildings at a later date close to the site of the new information board.

Acknowledgements

NPS Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help of Susan Holmes of English Heritage (who commissioned and funded the work) and the contractors, Rivermead Signs, who undertook the excavation on site.

Thanks also go to Sarah Howard of Norfolk Historic Environment Record and Sarah Tatham of English Heritage.

The finds were processed by Lucy Talbot and recorded and reported on by Rebecca Sillwood. The graphics were completed by David Dobson and the report edited by Jayne Bown.

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
1	Deposit	Topsoil	Post-medieval
2	Deposit	Tile and mortar layer	Post-medieval
3	Deposit	Subsoil	Post-medieval

Appendix 2a: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Qty	Wt	Period	Notes
2	Ceramic Building Material	3	143g	Medieval	Roof tile
2	Ceramic Building Material	1	20g	Post-medieval	Roof tile
2	Mortar		65g	Medieval	

Appendix 2b: OASIS Finds Summary

Period	Material	Total
Medieval	Ceramic Building Material	3
Medieval	Mortar	-
Post-medieval	Ceramic Building Material	1